

Porta Nigra

The Porta Nigra (Latin for "Black Gate") is an old city gate in the north of the city of Trier, which the Romans probably built in the 2nd century AD. They had founded the city of Trier in 16 BC. The gate was intended for representational purposes, but in the 3rd century it also served as a defence against the attacks of the Germanic tribes. In some places, markings are visible in the wall that contain dates. These dates allow us to estimate the construction time of the gate at about two to four years. Light-coloured sandstone blocks were used for the construction, which were placed on top of each other without mortar and connected with iron clamps. Over the centuries, the sandstone weathered and took on a dark colour, which gave the Porta Nigra its name in the Middle Ages. Originally, however, the gate was probably named "Porta Martis" after the Roman god of war Mars.

In the years 1028-1035, a Greek monk named Simeon inhabited part of the building as a hermit. After his death he was canonised and a church was built in his honour, which housed a monastery. For this church, the Porta Nigra was used as a building material. It was a double church with two church rooms on top of each other. The gateways were walled up and a much smaller city gate was built directly next to the Porta Nigra. Because only one tower was needed for the construction of the church, a tower structure of the Porta Nigra was demolished.

After several additions and alterations during the following centuries, Napoleon had the church and the monastery removed in 1802. From 1804 onwards, the additions from the Middle Ages were removed, until in 1815 the Roman gateway was once again visible. Only the lower part of the apse can still be seen of the church. After the demolition work, the first antique museum in Trier was opened in the Porta Nigra.

Since the 1970s, the Porta Nigra has been the only remaining structure of the Roman city fortifications. The city wall and all other city gates were demolished. Since 1986, the gate, together with other Roman cultural monuments in Trier and the surrounding area, has been a UNESCO World Heritage Site.